

THE STORY
OF CHIEF JOSEPH

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BY MARTHA PERRY LOWE.

Good friends, you ask to see my heart;
And here it is: I have no art.
Some of you think an Indian man
Is like a wild beast, to be shot;
Now I will show you, if I can,
Whether he is a man or not;
For what I here shall say to you
Will come out from my very heart;
I speak with a straight tongue and true,
And lying has in me no part.
The eyes of the Great Spirit always see;
Ah-cum-ken-i-ma-me-hut looks at me.

I am a chief of the Nez-Percés band,
So named by Frenchmen in our land.
You call me Joseph. Good, if you like that.
My true name is In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat.
You'd like to know the meaning of my name?
This is the way, they tell me, that it came:
My mother gave me birth on stormy night:
It means the thunder on the mountain height
Between the sudden flashes of the light.
My father did not leave a single spot
To stain my noble birth-right, not a blot.
Our chieftains left us many a solemn law,
That we should give men what they bargained for,
That we should scorn to tell a lie;
They told us the Great Spirit lived on high,
And had a spirit home above the sky;
That he would give a good place to the good,
A bad place to the bad: we understood
This, I believe; and all my fathers do.
Do white men think so, too?

*Versification of the speech of Chief Joseph, of East Oregon, given by Bishop Hare, of Niobrara, in the *North American Review* of April, 1879.

They never knew that there were other men,
With whiter faces, till the morning when
The Frenchmen came among them long ago, —
How long it is you know, —
And brought them pipes and guns,
Which scared the women and the little ones.
The good priests told them what was true,
And they were gentle in their speech,
And fatherly and wise.
The trappers told them many lies;
They did not like the holy father's preach;
When first the reverend men they saw,
They told them of the spirit law,
They said no word about the land;
But twenty years ago a stranger band
Came seeking dwelling-places there,
For there was room, and some to spare.

My father had the sharper eye,
He knew what all this meant,
Although we made no murmur nor complaint.
He was afraid of men who buy
And sell, and talk of loss and gain.
Next came an officer to make it plain,
Our Council sat, that he might show his heart;
His business he at length began to tell:
He said your nation thought it would be well
To have an Indian country set apart,
And bade us sign away our right.
My father pushed him from his sight,
And round the room did angry stalk.
"What is't you ask?" and grim he smiled.
"It is your business to come here and talk
About the spirit matters, not of land.
You can go where you please, sir, understand,
And so will I, for I am not a child,
That you should tell me where I am to walk!"
And then they stole around among
Our men, and tried the flattering tongue.
They brought us blankets red and blue,
Our people took them from their hand:
"Touch not their presents, old or new,"
My father cried with stern command,
And so he never sold away his land.

When he at last was old and blind,
A coward chieftain of our kind
Gave up the Wallow-Walla,—this we call
The country of the winding water-fall.
They bade us take our wives and little ones,
And move along to southern suns.
And then I took my father's place,
And made my first speech to the white men's face.
I told them I would never leave the graves
Where lay our fathers and where sleep our braves.
My father called me to his dying-bed,
And warned me, lifting up his head,
“Behold the white men come around :
Let them not touch the ground
Where all your fathers sleep.”
His word I vowed to keep ;
And then he smiled, and went to meet
The great good Spirit, Chief of Men.
I laid him in the glen,
The winding water at his feet.
I love the silent spot ;
And he deserves to be forgot,
Who holds not dear the stones
Where rest his father's bones.

We had a little time of rest,
And then the white men pressed
Closer and closer on our path,
With softest words that fired our wrath.
We were but few, and they a mighty band ;
We were contented with the land
Just as it came from the great Father's hand,
But they would pull the mountains down
To make room for the town.
Their generals came, and harried us with talk,
And strutted in their walk,
And bade us move our people back
Upon the reservation track.
Then Too-hoot-hool-suit answered, “Who are you,”
And looked as he would stare them through,
“That you should talk, and tell us to keep still ?
Are you the mighty will,
Can you create the rivers that we drink,
Or make the grass grow, do you think ?”
They sprang and put him under guard.

My young men could not keep their seat,
They leapt up to their feet;
My young braves pressed me hard.
Such insult they could never brook:
They would have killed your generals at one look,
One look from me. I told them to forbear,
And so they harmed them not a single hair.
I held them still, I kept the peace,
And got, ere long, our prisoner's full release.

What for my trouble did I gain?
Fresh insult. Yes, 'twas all in vain.
We had the very worst to fear:
New tidings went from ear to ear,
We must set out upon our way,
Our stock was scattered on the plain,
The river running high and strong.
We begged to wait the closing year,
To bring our cows and sheep along.
They answered, "Let a single day
Go by beyond the time of grace,
And we will drive you to your place,
And all outside shall be our prey."
My young men said that we must fight,
That blood alone could wash us white
From such an insult to our race.
I tried in vain to keep them still:
The Indian blood would have its will.
Panting and swift the war to wage,
They killed four white men in their rage.
I would have given my very life
To stop this hateful, bloody strife.
If you had treated us like men,
There would have been no war between us then.

It was too late, and war we had, —
You know the rest. You were not glad.
But, for ourselves, this I will say:
The Nez Percés no women slay,
Nor little children at their play.
We scalp our foeman's head,
And bury decently our dead:
You dug our kindred up again,
And cast dishonor on the slain;
You cared not where your footsteps trod,

Mangling the bodies in the sod.
We held a woman prisoner long,
And never offered her a wrong.
Can your white soldiers say as much?
Know you their insults to the Indian maid?
Say, were we guilty ever once of such?
Have we a woman's confidence betrayed?
I thought of all my little ones,
Trembling and wild with sudden fright:
I leapt along the line of guns,
I forced my way amid the thickest fight,
And reached my lodgings at a bound.
My wife ran out,—my gun she found,—
“Take it, and shoot them down!” she said.
I seized the gun, and I obeyed;
And so the battle raged that day.
We fought them twenty steps away,
We fought like tigers, down they dropped,
And, tired of it, the white men stopped.

The next day came a flag of truce,
They parleyed earnestly with me,
’Twixt war and peace they bade me choose.
The generals promised solemnly
We should go back again, and live
Upon our lands, if I would give
My arms to them. I thought of all
My men around, how they might fall:
The sick and dying came before
My soul, and smote me to the core.
And I believed the general's oath,
So I surrendered to them both.
How did your chieftains keep their troth?
Not like an Indian, I do swear.
They stole our cattle roaming there,
And turned our faces to the bound
You please to call the Indian Ground.

They moved us downward from the North.
New chiefs and captains now came forth,
And talked and argued without end,
Each one spoke different from his friend.
I said, “You gave your solemn word
That we should not again be stirred.”
Some said, “You cannot now go back,

The law is following on your track,
Because your men began the fight,"
I knew not which one had the right,
And some said all would come out well :
Each had a different tale to tell.
Too many chiefs you sent to me,
'Twas plain that they did not agree.
And, while they talked, my people died,
Sickened, and fell down at my side.
The land they gave us was not good,
The little children loathed their food,
The water made our spirits sink,
My fainting people could not drink.
And now, to end it, I have been
With Sitting Bull to Washington ;
And I have shaken hands with every one,
Your Father Chief, and all the mighty men.
They say that justice shall be done ;
But words will never give us back our dead ;
Words will not heal the sick, the dying save ;
Words, empty words, will never pay
For all our goods you took away ;
Words will not keep my father's grave,
And I am sick of all that you have said.

The great, good Spirit made us two :
The same blood is in me and you.
You might as well expect to see
The rivers run back to the hills,
Or chain the little mountain rills,
As that a being lithe and free,
An Indian-born, should be content
Within a little patch of forest pent.
I asked one of your men, a chief,
If 'twas his true belief
That white men should go where they may,
And red men in one place must stay ?
He dared not answer yea or nay.
No answer could I ever find
To questions heavy on my mind.

I know my race must soon decay ;
I know that we shall fade away,
Unless we march the road you take,
And drink the knowledge which your thirst doth slake.

So be it, then : we ask, we ask,
That you shall set us to your task.
We will accept it at your hands.
But give us back our lands !
Give us our freedom, give us law,
And there shall be no war.
The white and red men shall abide
As loving brothers, side by side,
Content and strong and free
Forever we shall be !
In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat
Has spoken for his race to-day,
In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat
Has finished what he has to say.